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Eyes Wide Shut: Democratic Reversals, Scientific Closure, and the Study of Politics in Eurasia*

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The article examines the relationship between democratic reversals and scientific closure. It focuses on the effects that authoritarian and hybrid regimes are likely to have on the ways scholars study them and conduct their fieldwork.

Method: Thematic content analysis of articles on Eurasian politics published over a ten year period, with particular attention paid to reported methods and fieldwork.

Results: Scientific closure had as much to do with research cycles in the discipline as with democratic reversals. Notions of the region as democratizing persisted into the 2000s as scholars recycled data and conceptual frames from the 1990s. Fieldwork-driven research was more likely to detect autocratization.

Conclusion: While disciplinary consensus re-framed the region as autocratizing, the field remains vulnerable to scientific closure. Aside from the challenges posed by autocracies for fieldwork, the new disciplinary consensus may deter qualitative fieldwork and innovation in studying authoritarianism in Eurasia.

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The collapse and breakup of the Soviet state promised not just a democratic breakthrough but a social scientific opening. In the 1990s, the former USSR became a vast proving ground for theories in comparative politics about regime transitions, institutional design, and identity politics. Scholars gained unprecedented access for fieldwork in the post-Soviet region at the same time that Eurasia's newly independent states grappled with the challenge (it was hoped) of crafting democracy. In the rush to plant comparative politics in post-Soviet soil, research focused on what was readily observable, measurable, and otherwise understandable in terms commensurate with mainstream political science in the West.

Aside from the Baltic states, Eurasia lagged considerably behind the pace of democratization in the former communist states of Eastern Europe. In fact, democratic reversals were more characteristic of the post-Soviet region than democratization. Freedom House expert rankings—however flawed—clearly reflect this trend for the region over the first decade of the 21st century (See Figure 1).¹ Yet the relationship between democratic reversals and scholarly access for fieldwork received little to no attention in comparison to the linked democratic and scientific openings that followed the collapse of the USSR, with the consequence that regime closure threatened to produce scientific closure.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

The breakup of the Soviet Union provided a scientific opening in a variety of ways, first and foremost by the rapid expansion of access for social science fieldwork in the 1990s (Rutland, 2003). If Sovietologists were ghettoized by the Soviet Union's alleged lack of comparability (except to other Soviet-style systems), "transitology"

became a booming academic industry.² The wave of regime change also significantly expanded the number of scholars with interest in the region—including many with no prior training in area studies—for whom the former Soviet states provided a vast theoretical and methodological proving ground. Moreover, regime change also created possibilities for comparative analysis, enabling scholars with regional expertise to publish in mainstream disciplinary journals. Data and research on the former Soviet states became infused with a wide range of influences and reached a larger audience than ever during the Soviet era. Underpinning this development was the assumption that the Soviet states had become democratic or were democratizing.

Based on this experience with scientific opening following the collapse of the USSR, it stands to reason that scientific closure may occur in three ways related to democratic reversals in the region: first, hybrid and authoritarian regimes can limit access to the region and the ability to apply common fieldwork techniques, particularly (though not exclusively) for Western scholars. Second, as opportunities diminish for the application of methods that presume or require relatively open political environments, scholars are more likely to adjust their case selection and relocate their research to more congenial sites rather than engage in theoretical retooling or new area training. This is not to say that research output necessarily declines but that qualitative, fieldwork-based research and direct experience within the region may decline even as interest in the region remains high. In other words, the expectation of obstacles to research posed by authoritarianism becomes a deterrent. Third, the consensus in the discipline about a regime's dynamics may become resistant to verification through fieldwork, especially as involvement of non-area specialists increases. As a consequence, vital information about

dynamics within hybrid and authoritarian regimes—including their sources of stability and change—potentially goes unobserved and only becomes relevant to the broader scientific community *after* political openings, as with the “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003-4, Kyrgyzstan’s uprising in 2010, and again in Ukraine after the ouster of Viktor Yanukovich in 2014.³

This article unpacks the sources of scientific closure in the study of politics in Eurasia. It begins with an assessment of the attributes of hybrid and authoritarian regimes likely to affect the conduct of fieldwork. The article next examines whether research articles published in political science and area studies journals over the first decade of the 21st century provide evidence of such effects on scholarly output. The article concludes that scientific closure is likely to be related to democratic reversals, but that research cycles also play an important role in the ways they resonate with changes in access to the field. In the study of Eurasian politics, one might even say that the field of study prematurely suffered from scientific closure. Though the study of authoritarianism once more occupies a central place in comparative politics, it largely reflects the discipline’s preference for formalistic and quantitative analysis rather than a renewed interest in fieldwork.

In examining the relationship between autocratization and scientific closure, it is useful to narrow the scope of comparison to post-Soviet Eurasia. First, all countries in the region benefited from the scientific and political openings that followed the collapse of the USSR at the same time, even if regime trajectories varied. This means that various international influences and even regime starting points as potential factors affecting access for fieldwork may be held relatively “constant,” whereas comparing fieldwork

access in other autocratizing regions or historical periods would complicate matters by involving additional contingencies or constraints not present in the post-Soviet cases.⁴ Second, for the purpose of comparing variations in published research, scholars focusing on the region tend to publish both in general political science journals as well as a common pool of area studies journals—indeed, they publish in the latter journals in much greater numbers. Involving scholarship on other regions would raise tricky measurement issues as not all area scholars publish in the same sorts of venues. Third, the democratic reversals in the post-Soviet space are historically and scientifically significant in their own right. They are inscribed within a distinct wave of social mobilization and regime change that configured the region's successor regimes and their claims to legitimacy, as well as the second wave of electoral revolutions in post-Communist Europe and the former Soviet Union (Beissinger, 2007; Bunce & Wolchik, 2010).

AUTHORITARIANISM AND THE POTENTIAL FOR SCIENTIFIC CLOSURE

As of 2010, only the Baltic states were unambiguously recognized as democratic among the former Soviet states. Of the remaining states in Eurasia, four were competitive authoritarian regimes, six were hegemonic authoritarian, and two were fully closed authoritarian regimes (see Table 1). This distribution of regimes reflects more broadly the growth and diversity of authoritarianism in the post-Cold War era, as governments assumed to be transitioning towards democracy turned out to be pointed in different directions (Carothers, 2002; Diamond, 2002; Levitsky & Way, 2010). This was particularly evident in the post-Soviet sphere, where Russia and the other Soviet

successor states saw democracy derailed, trapped in cycles of neo-patrimonial rule, or simply “lost in transition” (Fish, 2005; Hale, 2010; Shevtsova, 2007).

Though regimes that mix formal democratic institutions with authoritarian practice existed prior to the end of the Cold War, scholars initially treated them either as waypoints in transition (like *democradura* or *dictablanda*) or as diminished subtypes of democracy (O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Collier & Levitsky, 1997; O’Donnell, 1994; Zakaria, 2004). “Hybrid” regimes combine elements of democracy and authoritarianism, though the term generally refers to forms of authoritarianism featuring semi-competitive elections or formally democratic institutions (such as multiparty legislatures) that serve to disguise dictatorship (Brooker, 2000). In this sense, hybrid regimes are sometimes called electoral authoritarian regimes (Linz, 2000; Schedler, ed., 2006). The nature of the opposition’s participation and the regime’s control of electoral outcomes serve to distinguish electoral authoritarian from closed authoritarian regimes and to differentiate two varieties of hybrid regimes. In *competitive authoritarian regimes*, power is obtained through formal democratic institutions though incumbents regularly violate the rules to maintain office. Nevertheless, incumbents are constrained in their ability to control the whole of the playing field. Courts may exercise some independence, some actors in big business may not cooperate with the regime, and some independent press exists to challenge the regime’s narratives. Opposition parties or candidates compete in elections, which incumbents ignore at their peril (Levitsky & Way, 2002). By contrast, *hegemonic authoritarian regimes* allow elections but limit real competition to just the ruling party or the regime’s favored candidates. The opposition might be allowed formally to participate

in elections but in practice, it is shut out the ballot box, the media, the courts, and sometimes the country (Howard and Roessler, 2006).

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

The nature of hybrid regimes poses particular challenges to the conduct of fieldwork when contrasted with democratic and fully closed authoritarian regimes. As a general rule, hybrid regimes are sensitive to scrutiny by international actors as regularly evidenced by complaints about Freedom House scores or resistance to international election monitoring. Since democratic regimes are already open to scrutiny by their citizens, they are less sensitive to foreign researchers conducting fieldwork. In electoral authoritarian regimes, international scrutiny of a regime's misdeeds and exposure of scandal or vote tampering may provide the opposition with a critical resource, emboldening street protests or encouraging defections among the regime's elite (Tucker, 2007).

Where electoral revolutions succeed in post-communist countries, international actors actively support the development of civil society and media, encourage unity among opposition forces, and provide training and support (Bunce and Wolchik, 2010). It is not surprising, then, that various regimes in the post-Soviet region act to limit and constrain foreign election monitors, as well as domestic non-governmental organizations involved in monitoring fraud and electoral malpractice. To cite a few examples, Russia tightened restrictions on election monitors in advance of the 2007 parliamentary elections and the 2008 presidential election such that the OSCE pulled out completely ("OSCE Election Monitor Cancels Plans to Monitor Vote," 2008). After adopting new legislation in 2012 to force NGOs receiving foreign funding for political activities to re-register as

“foreign agents” (a Stalinist-era euphemism for “spy”), the first target of Russia’s Justice Ministry was the independent election monitoring agency *Golos* (Tumanov et al., 2013).

Belarus initially refused entry visas to a delegation of European Union MPs for the 2006 presidential election (BBC, 2006). Following the 2010 presidential election, it ejected the OSCE’s monitors after they accused Lukashenko’s regime of widespread fraud (Schwartz, 2011). In the run up to Moldova’s repeat elections in 2009, international election observers were detained and some were expelled (“Moldovan Officials Detain, Expel Election Observers,” 2009). Given this sensitivity, authoritarian regimes in the former Soviet region may feel unwilling to draw distinctions between foreign election monitors, opposition activists, and scholars who study politics. The experience of Stanford political scientist Michael McFaul is perhaps instructive in this regard. Almost immediately upon his arrival in Moscow as US ambassador to Russia in 2012, McFaul was painted by state media as working for American NGOs with the backing of US intelligence, insinuating that he was plotting revolution in Russia (Remnick, 2014).

Sensitivity to scrutiny may also stem from a regime’s awareness of the limits of its organizational or coercive capacity, or the degree of its vulnerability to international leverage (Way & Levitsky, 2007). In turn, this sensitivity may translate into obstacles for conducting fieldwork. One may identify a set of gatekeeper effects that govern a scholar’s access to the field. At a very fundamental level, these effects relate to the ability to acquire the necessary visas and official permissions. Electoral authoritarian regimes may resist the conduct of fieldwork by foreign researchers, or more generally of research funded from foreign sources that connects international actors and domestic opposition. Foreign researchers are also vulnerable to revocation of visa status while conducting

fieldwork or denial of permission in the future. There have been multiple reports in recent years of Western scholars accused of visa infractions and deported from Russia, particularly those researching political topics (Schreck, 2015). For doctoral students or junior scholars, the consequences of such interventions can be dire: deportation can force one to abandon future research in the region, or even to change one's career.

One may further observe gatekeeper effects in terms of access to elites for interviews, opportunities to conduct mass surveys, and scholarly collaboration with domestic academics. In each case, a regime's perceived opportunity to derive value from the research may offset barriers to access. Even though elite interviews may be difficult to obtain, it is possible that interviewees have an interest in obtaining the very information sought by researchers. The opacity of hybrid regimes poses a challenge not just to those who study them but also to those working within them. Information about the regime's operation, its viability, or even the likelihood that an individual may possess such information may prove an advantage for ambitious elites. By the same token, elites might have an interest in spreading disinformation to bolster the regime's democratic claims. In either case, one expects that the decision to grant an interview is taken only after the researcher has been vetted (formally or informally).

In a related sense, it is possible to conduct survey research in competitive authoritarian regimes though to differing degrees. Surveys may simply contribute to the noise created by other regime-sponsored studies. Alternatively, they can provide the kind of information that the regime might otherwise not be able to acquire since elections are not a reliable guide to popular sentiment. Since survey research usually relies upon collaboration with local research teams, the visibility of foreign researchers is reduced

and regimes might consider such variants safer and easier to monitor (or discredit) than individual researchers conducting fieldwork. Regardless, there remains some question over the utility of survey data gathered in authoritarian regimes. In Russia, a recent Levada Center study found that one out of four Russians is afraid of expressing their opinion when polled, and more than half believe that Russians do not answer polls truthfully for fear of negative consequences (Korchenkova and Goriashko, 2016).

Scholarly collaboration requires substantial and free-flowing contacts with domestic researchers, rendering it vulnerable to monitoring by the regime in question (or of attracting its attention). While the autonomy of universities is precarious in non-democratic regimes,⁵ hybrid regimes still require policy and administrative expertise such that academic institutions are unlikely to be permanently shuttered. In advance of Russia's presidential election in 2008, European University at St. Petersburg was closed owing to alleged violations of the city's fire safety code, though the move was understood to be politically motivated. After the election, it was allowed to open its doors once more (Petlianova, 2008). In part, whether this kind of interference translates into diminished collaboration with foreign academics depends on the resilience and determination of domestic scholars in electoral authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, there is evidence that political scientists in regional universities retreat from commenting on domestic politics for fear of losing their jobs and sometimes they are co-opted by the system (Deriabin, 2008). In Uzbekistan, political science was banned altogether from universities on official grounds of being a Western pseudo-science that fails to take the "Uzbek model" of development into account (Luhn, 2015).

It bears noting that these gatekeeper effects point to the difficulty (if not the impossibility) of maintaining scholarly distance from one's subject of study. However much scholars may attempt to remain objective and avoid normative engagement while conducting fieldwork, it is unlikely that they will be viewed as neutral observers by those who live and work in hybrid regimes. Even using the term "regime" is taken by many as an insult or an accusation of the government's illegitimacy. This places an additional bind upon researchers in the inability to keep description and prescription separate: avoiding prescription may mean that citizens come to perceive the researcher as no better than a (Western) regime functionary while they continue to be excluded by regime insiders.

In addition to gatekeeper effects on interactive methods of data collection, one may also find constraints on research methods that rely upon observations of formal institutional procedure. Here one is likely to find differences between competitive authoritarian and closed authoritarian regimes. In hybrid regimes, the contestation of formal institutions remains essential for obtaining power while their ongoing operation is necessary for its preservation. While formal institutional proceedings may not prove a reliable guide to a regime's decision-making, they may yet provide opportunities for the opposition to register protest or principled disagreement. The more autocratic the regime, however, the less it is concerned about controlling opposition than preventing elite defections.⁶ In practice, this means ensuring that agreement among ruling elites and token opposition are kept "off the books" to sustain the illusion of contestation and the rule of law.

Related to this is the comparatively greater extent to which hegemonic authoritarian regimes constrain civil liberties, particularly freedom of expression. In

competitive authoritarian regimes, press sources are weakened by journalistic habits of self-censorship and self-preservation, or otherwise by the opportunity to produce news favorable to government or opposition at a price. Yet the existence of a legitimate opposition with a (slim) shot at power means that opposition or independent press may still exist and be triangulated with the pro-government press. In hegemonic authoritarian regimes, the expansion of government control over the press limits the possibility of identifying even mercenary sentiments. Unsanctioned organization, demonstration, or protest will likely go unreported, misreported, or suffer belittlement. Where hegemonic authoritarian regimes are more sensitive to international scrutiny, however, they are likely to allow a tiny number of opposition press outlets to remain in operation to evidence the regime's formal respect for democratic freedoms.

OBSERVING SCIENTIFIC CLOSURE: PUBLISHED RESEARCH ON POLITICS IN EURASIA, 1999-2008

The model of scientific closure proposed above describes a relationship between regime-imposed constraints and the pre-research choices made by scholars regarding cases, methods, and fieldwork. In a previous study, my examination of published research on Russian politics over the period 1999-2008 discovered an overall decline in fieldwork that roughly corresponded to rising authoritarianism in Russia (Goode, 2010). While scholars did not stop going to Russia altogether, they increasingly utilized data and methods that did not require fieldwork. Those who continued to conduct fieldwork tended to be established scholars with prior research experience gained during the 1990s

or early 2000s. By contrast, emerging scholars appeared to be deterred from conducting fieldwork in Russia, choosing to take their preferred methods to more congenial climes.

The present study widens the scope of published research to include two countries each in the European (Belarus and Ukraine), Caucasian (Armenia and Georgia), and Central Asian (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) regions of the former Soviet Union. Countries that underwent “color revolutions” in the 2000s (Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan) are paired with countries within the same region that remained relatively unchanged (Armenia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan) to observe whether political openings were followed by changes in reported fieldwork. The sampled articles also include cross-national studies. In sum, the expanded study comprises 521 articles featuring clearly identifiable methodologies published in thirteen journals over a ten-year period covering politics in seven countries.⁷ The sample excludes purely descriptive, interpretive, or synthetic articles.

I examined each article for evidence of original data collection, nature of research design (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed), and fieldwork.⁸ Despite including scholarship on six additional countries and cross-national studies, there were more than twice as many articles about Russian politics than the remaining cases combined (see Table 2). In relying on scholars’ self-reporting of methods and fieldwork, one may only infer in some cases the nature and influence of gatekeeper effects from what is reported in published research. Nevertheless, the data suggest a relationship between regime constraints, scholars’ research choices, and the likelihood of scientific closure.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

For the decade as a whole, the average proportion of articles reporting fieldwork is reassuringly high (See Figure 2), ranging from 75% to 89% for all countries except Russia (44%) and Ukraine (51%). It is worth noting that the number of authors per year among these cases is almost equal to the number of articles. In other words, emerging scholars continued to enter the field rather than a few established scholars dominating publishing space. However, these scholars remained few in number and the high rate of turnover suggests that they did not continue researching and publishing about those cases.⁹ In other words, gaining access to the field was not be as uniformly daunting a problem in practice as expected, but emerging scholars still appeared to take their research elsewhere.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

The high rates of reported fieldwork versus the low rates of publishing (aside from Russia, Ukraine, and cross-national studies) suggest that research cycles played a significant role in scientific closure. For lesser-known countries, one naturally expects fieldwork to be limited by the availability of exotic language skills or prior area training aside from regime-imposed constraints. Lesser-known cases thus present scholars with higher startup costs given the low density of research infrastructure and the need for specialized training. In turn, they conceivably bear a higher evidentiary burden in locating cases within established research traditions than better-known cases around which a disciplinary consensus has formed.

Better-known cases benefit from a larger pool of existing data, secondary literature, established research infrastructure, and the availability of standardized training. Not surprisingly, fieldwork was less frequently reported among articles on Russia,

Ukraine¹⁰, and cross-national studies relying upon (relatively) common language skills and quantitative methods training. In contrast to lesser-known cases, scholars working on these areas face a higher evidentiary burden when challenging a disciplinary consensus. One might therefore reason that scientific closure is more likely to occur where disciplinary consensus (a) is congenial to the regimes studied, and (b) substitutes for—or remains in place, despite the deprecation of—fieldwork and research infrastructure.

There is some evidence for thinking that these conditions for scientific closure obtained in the 2000s in the study of Eurasian politics. Research articles involving countries of the former Soviet Union favored qualitative over quantitative and mixed methods in the latter years of the period under scrutiny (see Figure 3). Qualitative methods were responsible for the bulk of reported fieldwork conducted in the former Soviet republics with quantitative fieldwork contributing just 6-10% of the total in any given year. Particularly curious is that the use of quantitative and mixed methods peaked *prior* to regime change in those countries where color revolutions occurred, followed by a rise in qualitative methods in the following years (see Figure 4). In part, this corresponds to the expectation that quantitative and qualitative fieldwork face different degrees of resistance by electoral authoritarian regimes.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]

Given the sensitivity of closed and autocratizing regimes to claims that they are not democratic, the cross-national studies are of particular use for probing the relationship between regime type and disciplinary consensus. The cross-national studies are the only category for which more articles were published in the general political

science journals (60%) than area studies journals, meaning they bear a higher visibility in the discipline.¹¹ These articles also exhibit the least amount of reported fieldwork (26%) and the highest use of quantitative and mixed methods (73%). Thematic content analysis of these articles reveals that the most numerous topics are regime transitions and democratization (31.6%) followed by parties and elections (23.3%), while authoritarianism and hybrid regimes (13.3%) comes next to last (Figure 5). However, if one counts just the cross-national articles that reported some form of fieldwork, studies of authoritarianism and hybrid regimes take a narrow lead (10%) over regime transitions and democratization (8.3%), followed by political economy (5%), and articles on parties and elections (1.6%) tie for last with articles on identity and security (Figure 6). In sum, cross-national studies not reporting fieldwork were more likely to focus on democratization and formal democratic institutions than autocratization and authoritarianism.¹²

[INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE]

One potential implication is that the lack of fieldwork helped to keep democracy and democratization on the academic agenda even when the regimes studied were autocratizing.¹³ Part of the reason for this might be that cross-national studies tended to elide differences among regime types.¹⁴ More pronounced is the tendency of cross-national studies to draw upon data collected during the previous decade when regimes appeared (or were assumed) to be democratizing.¹⁵ It is worth noting that such studies favored the use of survey data collected in the European portion of the former Soviet Union (Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine) and rarely included cases from Central

Asia or the Caucasus. By contrast, studies including data from Central Asia and the Caucasus are more cautious in their use of “democracy” and “democratizing” to categorize and organize cases.¹⁶

It does not appear to be the case that common knowledge or assumptions about the autocratizing nature of post-Soviet regimes produced a non-experiential consensus regarding their dynamics. Rather, the lingering assumption of their *democratizing* nature seemed to persist through the 2000s—particularly among cross-national studies lacking reported fieldwork. In this sense, the study of post-Soviet regimes might be said to have suffered from “premature” scientific closure. In terms of the politics of fieldwork, this may further explain why electoral authoritarian regimes in Eurasia exercised gatekeeper interference with restraint: there were not that many scholars conducting fieldwork in the region, while much of the time the regimes were framed within the universe of democratic or democratizing states.

Against this model of scientific closure, it might be objected that changes in methods and fieldwork simply reflect changes in intellectual priorities or the nature of research questions driving academic agendas. With particular regard to the color revolutions, for example, scholars may have been attracted by “non-routine” or contentious politics. Cross-national studies might therefore be a poor indicator of what the discipline considers to be on the cutting edge. Instead, one would expect small-*n* comparisons and process-oriented investigation to predominate before new regimes can be re-integrated into large-*n* quantitative analysis. However, there is little evidence of an influx of scholars stimulated by regime change and political openings in the region during this period. Instead, the color revolutions were covered mainly by established

scholars in descriptive and synthetic articles.¹⁷ This is especially visible in Ukraine's case—the best covered of the color revolutions—where a sudden increase in publications and simultaneous decline in reported fieldwork in 2005 stands in contrast to the previous electoral cycle which featured a roughly equivalent level of publications in 2002 with nearly all reporting fieldwork (see Figure 7).¹⁸ When factoring in the lag time between the conduct of fieldwork and publication, the recovery in rates of fieldwork toward the end of the decade arguably reflects the extent to which even modest political openings facilitated access to the field: all fieldwork for articles published in 2008 was conducted between 2005 and 2007, while only two of the articles published during this uptick were actually about color revolutions (both on Ukraine).

[INSERT FIGURE 5.7 HERE]

AUTOCRATIZATION AND SCIENTIFIC CLOSURE IN EURASIA: A REVISED MODEL

In light of this assessment of published research on politics in post-Soviet Eurasia, the hypothesized relationship between regime closure and scientific closure requires some revision. I expected to find a clear relationship between democratization, autocratization, and access to the field. While there clearly was an increase in reported fieldwork following the color revolutions in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine, published research on post-Soviet politics generally showed high rates of fieldwork across the board. Much of this work was published in area studies journals rather than general disciplinary journals, while cross-national studies exhibiting the lowest rates of fieldwork were published most often in general disciplinary journals. The latter articles were further

characterized by a reliance on quantitative and mixed methods research designs and a pronounced tendency to classify Soviet successor states as democratic or democratizing.

These observations allow for a re-formulation of the model of scientific closure which originates not with democratic reversals, but with the regime openings in post-Soviet Eurasia that preceded them (see Table 3). While democratization in the 1990s was incomplete, at best, it permitted an influx of scholars into the region and facilitated a variety of original data collection projects. The regime openings meant that these projects were replicable by other scholars (including non-area specialists). Moreover, they quickly gained visibility within the discipline. Democratization dominated discussions of post-communist and post-Soviet politics throughout the decade, forming an academic consensus on the region even as the dynamics of transition and democratization were hotly debated.¹⁹

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

Given this consensus, the discipline was slow to acknowledge democratic reversals already underway in the 1990s, as scholars preferred instead to characterize them in terms of “stalled” transitions in weak states. In turn, framing regime trajectories in this fashion allowed for the ongoing use or re-purposing of data gathered during the previous period of regime opening, effectively confirming the consensus characterization of the region as democratizing even as it moved in the opposite direction. Scholars who continued to conduct fieldwork *challenged* this consensus in documenting autocratization in the region, but their research was published in area journals and did not achieve visibility within the discipline. As a result, it took real world events to force acknowledgement in the field of the eclipse of democratization by autocratization: the

color revolutions not only exposed the sham democracies that they replaced, but threw into sharp relief their successor regimes as well as other post-Soviet hybrid regimes that bore similar attributes but avoided regime change.²⁰ In this sense, the color revolutions elevated the visibility of prior studies of autocratization while *infirming* the scholarly consensus around democratization as an appropriate concept for describing the region's political dynamics.

CONCLUSION: NEW CONSENSUS, NEW SOURCES OF CLOSURE?

The study of post-Soviet politics illustrates that political openings have the potential to stimulate social scientific openings—not merely by facilitating access to the field, but by disrupting existing consensus about regime dynamics. In the study of Eurasian politics, the use of democratizing frames of analysis since the 1990s declined by the end of the 2000s, along with the rising prominence of the “new authoritarianism” in comparative politics. Transformative events like the collapse of Soviet rule and the post-Soviet color revolutions thus alter the way entire regions are understood for both scholars and those involved in making post-Soviet politics. Indeed, the color revolutions also led observant Eurasian autocrats like Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin to take measures to avoid a repeat in their own capitals (Koesel & Bunce, 2013; Silitski, 2010). More recently these measures included limiting scholars' access to foreign sources of funding and placing collaboration with foreign academics under closer scrutiny.

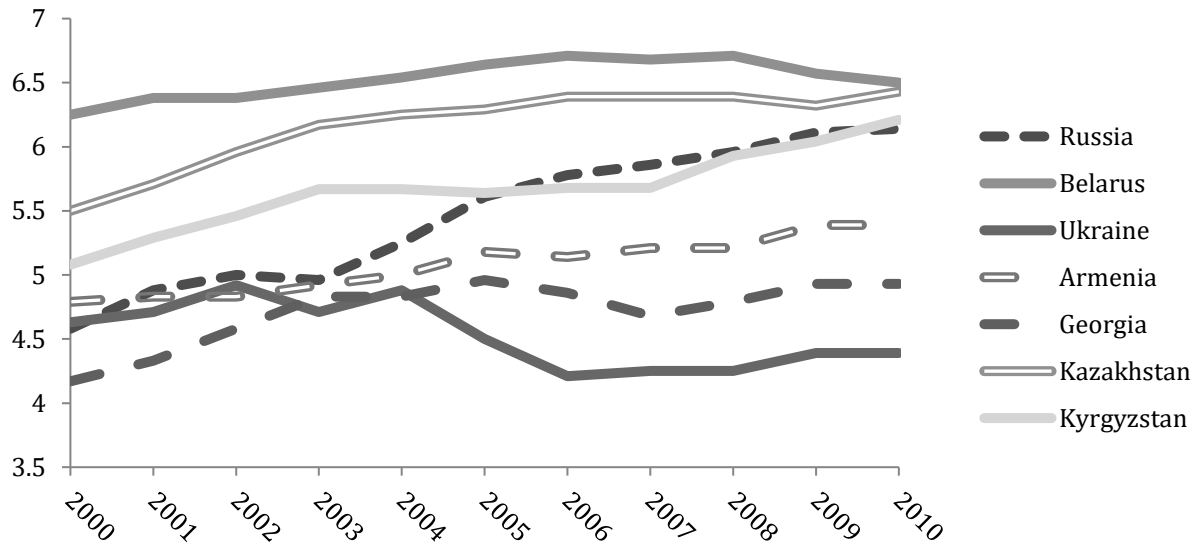
The emergence of the “new authoritarianism” and autocratization as a new disciplinary consensus occasioned a shift in methods and data that are distinct from those previously used for studying democratization. While a full accounting goes beyond the

confines of this article, they include the compiling of elite biographies (Buckley et al., 2014) and social network analysis (George et al., 2016) for studying patronage and elite mobility, the use of list experiments in survey design to ask sensitive questions (Frye et al., 2016), the creation of new datasets on protest and mobilization (Lankina, 2015), the adaptation of electoral forensics for examining stolen elections (Myagkov et al., 2009), and the use of content and discourse analysis for assessing the nature of regime legitimation (Smyth & Oates, 2015) or protest mobilization (Onuch, 2015).

To the extent that the new consensus facilitates methodological creativity in the study of post-Soviet Eurasia, it follows the discipline's preference for formalistic approaches that draw upon open sources and replicable datasets. As suggested by the brief list, above, the main forms of methodological innovation are in quantitative and (to a lesser extent) mixed methods. Hence, while research on authoritarianism and autocratization in Eurasia now appears more likely to be published in mainstream journals and to be valued by the discipline as a whole, it is not necessarily more likely to involve fieldwork.

In addition, changes in the way political science as a discipline seeks to impose quantitative standards for replicability on qualitative data keeps open the possibility of scientific closure in the study of Eurasia. The "Data Access and Research Transparency" (DA-RT) movement in the American Political Science Association creates significant career uncertainty for scholars engaging in qualitative fieldwork in authoritarian or autocratizing regimes.²¹ Much depends on how such a requirement will be implemented. In particular, the requirement that scholars hand over their field notes, interview transcripts, and other materials to serve as replication data is far more problematic than

the presentation of replication data in quantitative studies. In particular, there is a very real risk that making such raw data and field observations available would compromise the anonymity of respondents, making research involving sensitive topics or vulnerable populations impossible to conduct ethically. However, this would be an extreme outcome that does not reflect the interests of the discipline or its leading journals.²² Indeed, it would be a sad irony if political science embraced the study of authoritarianism in Eurasia, only to prove more effective than Eurasian autocrats in deterring scholars from conducting fieldwork.

Figure 1: Freedom House Democracy Scores, 2000-2010**Table 1: Electoral and Closed Authoritarian Regimes in Eurasia (2010)**

Competitive Authoritarian	Hegemonic Authoritarian	Closed Authoritarian
Armenia	Azerbaijan	
Georgia	Belarus	
Moldova	Kazakhstan	Turkmenistan
Ukraine	Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan
	Russia	
	Tajikistan	

Table 2: Summary of Published Research with Identifiable Methods and Fieldwork, 1999-2008

Country of Study	Articles	Reported Fieldwork	Area Journals	Discipline Journals
Russia	345	152	294	51
Ukraine	65	33	54	6
Cross-national	60	17	24	36
Kazakhstan	15	12	14	1
Belarus	13	9	13	0
Georgia	9	8	2	7
Kyrgyzstan	9	8	7	2
Armenia	5	3	5	0
TOTAL	521*	242	413	103

* A few small-*n* studies were counted for each country of study, hence the slightly higher total.

Figure 2: Articles Reporting Fieldwork, 1999-2008

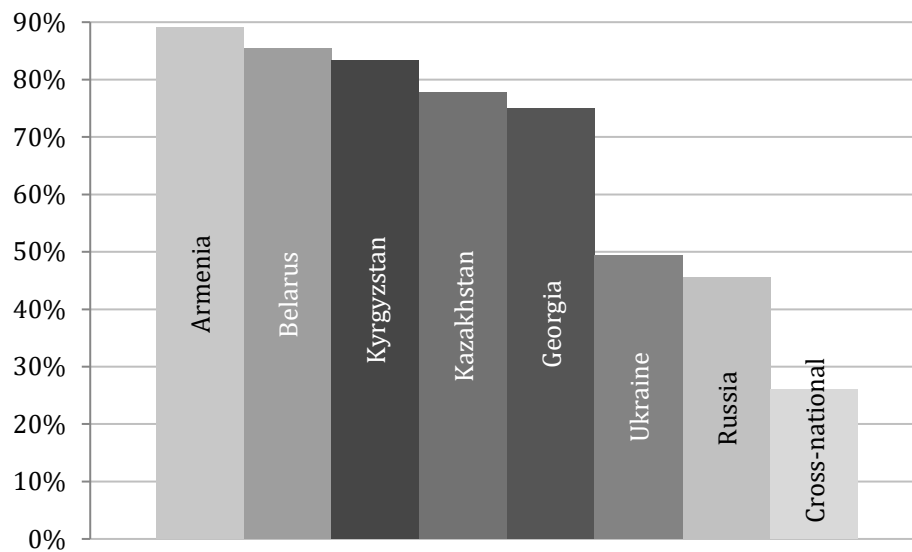


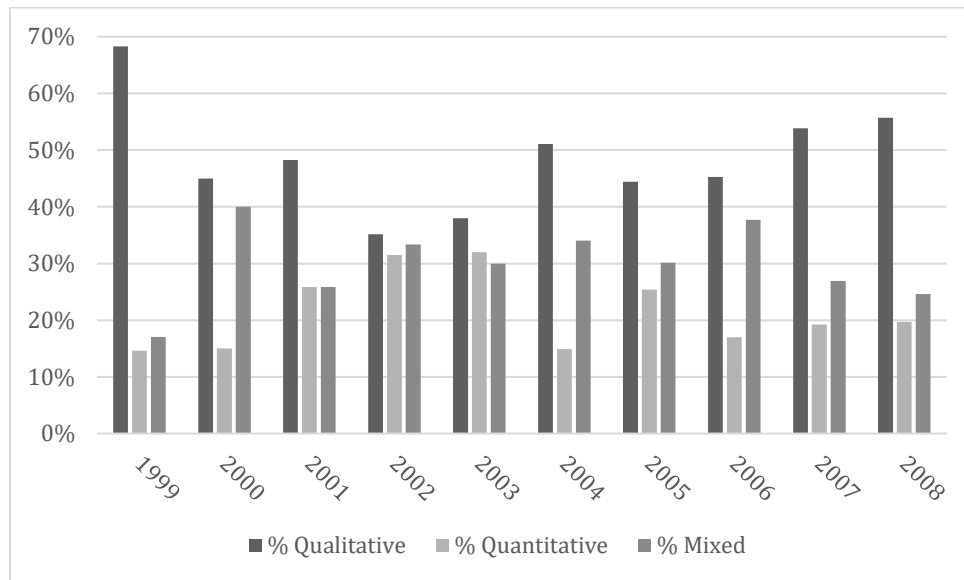
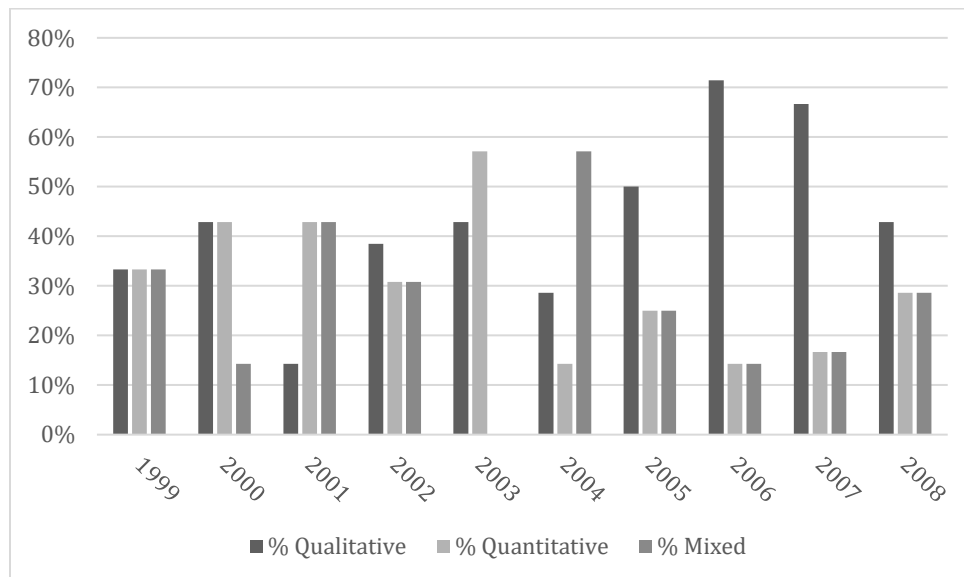
Figure 3: Research Design (All Countries)**Figure 4: Research Design (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine)**

Figure 5: Content Analysis of Cross-National Articles

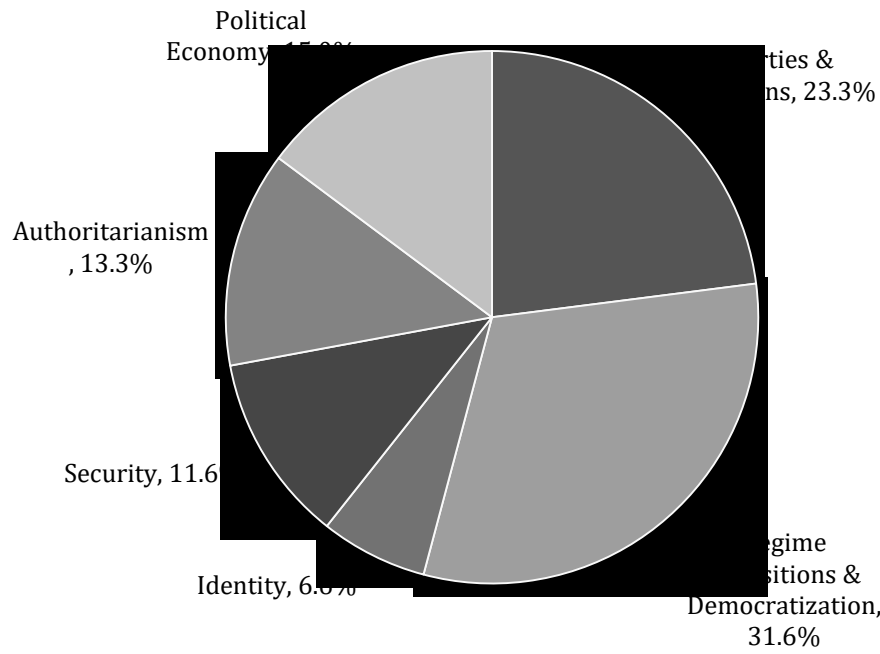


Figure 6: Content Analysis of Cross-National Articles Reporting Fieldwork

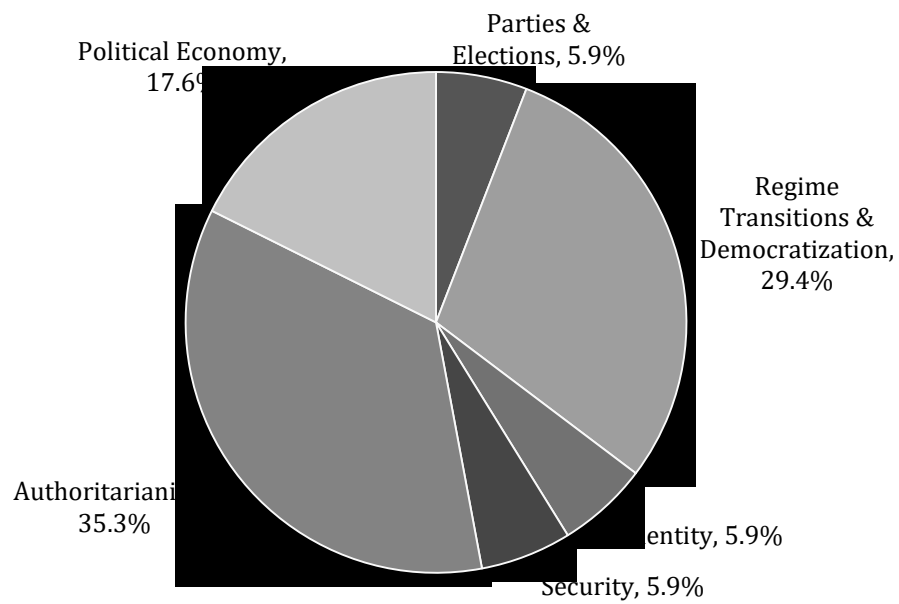
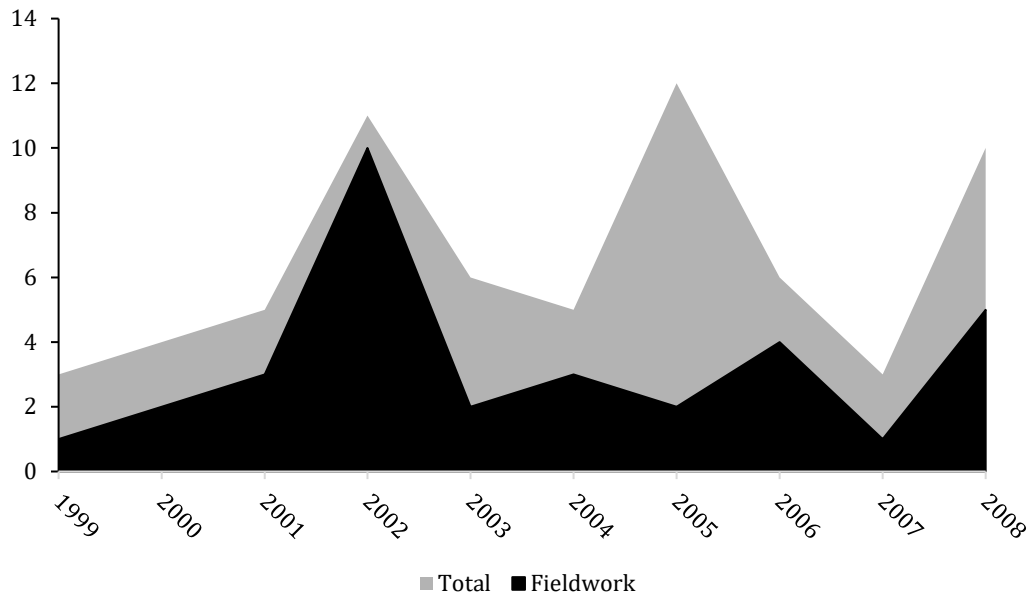


Figure 7: Articles Reporting Fieldwork (Ukraine)**Table 3: Regime Trajectories, Research Cycles, and Scientific Closure**

Regime trajectory	Data	Replicability	Visibility	Impact
Democratization	Original data collection	High	High	Consensus forming
Autocratization	Re-purposing	High	High	Consensus confirming
	Adaptation, or non-standard techniques	Low	Low	Consensus challenging
		Low	High	Consensus infirming
	Original data collection	High	High	Consensus (re-)forming

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¹ Freedom House (<http://www.freedomhouse.org>) evaluates countries along a number of categories, assigning a numerical score between one (most free) and seven (least free). The composite scores are compared in its annual "Freedom in the World" and "Nations in Transit" reports.

² Of course, the charges leveled against Sovietologists often amounted to caricature rather than actual assessment of their collective work. Indeed, scholars in the post-Soviet era increasingly turn to the past to find solutions for conducting research under the present regimes. For a review of Sovietology's accomplishments and limitations, see Breslauer (1992), Engerman (2009), Rutland (2008), and Unger (1998).

³ While Kyrgyzstan also underwent a color revolution in 2005, scholarly interest and published research remained minimal compared to Georgia and Ukraine. In any case, the new regime under Kurmanbek Bakiev failed to democratize and was overthrown by popular uprising in April 2010.

⁴ Cross-regional comparisons may be useful, of course, though arguably they would benefit from initial intra-regional comparisons to establish a baseline for observation. On cross-regional comparisons, see Chen and Sil (2007).

⁵ Common patterns of academic control emerged under the totalitarian and communist dictatorships of the twentieth century. These involved: bringing teaching and research in line with ideology; ideologically-motivated purging of students and faculty; political control of access to universities; curtailing or eliminating university self-governance; and restricting international contacts (Grüttner, 2005).

⁶ Gandhi (2010) argues that legislatures in fully authoritarian regimes help to ensure elite loyalty (and regime survivability) as mechanisms for inclusion and patronage.

⁷ The journals are: *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Comparative Politics*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Government and Opposition*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Politics & Society*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, *Slavic Review*, and *World Politics*.

⁸ “Quantitative” articles chiefly involved survey data and the use of regression techniques.

Descriptive statistics, alone, were not sufficient to categorize an article as quantitative.

“Qualitative” articles reported interviews, use of focus groups, content analysis, or other forms of systematic textual analysis. “Mixed” articles involved some combination of both. In relying on scholars to report their methods and fieldwork, it is possible that this approach misses those scholars who conduct regular fieldwork but do not rely upon (or report) their field observations as part of their empirical strategy. Similarly, many of the authors of the descriptive and synthetic articles excluded from this study undoubtedly possessed fieldwork experiences that directly or indirectly had a bearing on their publications. My own sense is that researchers who combine serious amounts of regular fieldwork with quantitative research are relatively few in number. They are more likely to be part of the core group of experienced researchers who repeatedly

publish in the area than the larger floating group with higher rate of turnover. It may also be the case that disciplinary standards do not impose a sense that scholars' fieldwork is valued or that it needs to be reported. Such matters go beyond the purview of this article, though conceivably one might begin to explore this possibility by polling scholars about their fieldwork and the rates at which they report it in their published work. However, if disciplinary standards are in play, then clever research design would be required to overcome social desirability bias.

⁹ This might be due to personal developments (i.e., employment or family demands) so one must be careful not to read too much into this trend, though one might equally expect that scholars would continue to mine their hard-won fieldwork observations in later publications—particularly if personal circumstances constrained them from continuing active research.

¹⁰ While experts on Ukraine might (rightly) protest that Ukrainian is not a commonly taught language, scholars may still be able to conduct fieldwork and communicate in Russian throughout much of Ukraine.

¹¹ This trend is comparable to the distribution of methods in published comparative research throughout the discipline (Mahoney, 2007).

¹² As Brown (2005: 2-3) notes, "It is hard to resist the conclusion that authoritarian systems do not get the attention they deserve in leading journals...mainly because some of the more fashionable modes of analysis cannot be usefully applied to their study."

¹³ One might see this as related to (or even a consequence of) scholars' perception of "transitology" as the dominant paradigm in the study of post-communist politics (Gans-Morse, 2004).

¹⁴ For example, Tavits's (2008) study of party system fluidity in "new democracies" in Eastern Europe includes Russian parliamentary elections in 1995, 1999, and 2003, and Ukrainian elections in 1998 and 2000. Similarly, Birch's (2007) examination of electoral misconduct among postcommunist countries completely avoids regime categories. In explaining that "elections became competitive, with increased opportunities for voluntary contestation and participation" in

all postcommunist countries, elections in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia, and Uzbekistan (to name a few) appear as “problematic” but still comparable to Croatia, Estonia, or Slovakia.

¹⁵ Beliaev (2006: 394) examines institutional design among postcommunist democracies from 1993 to 1998, acknowledging regime differences only in terms of the “weakness of democratic institutions” in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and other superpresidential regimes. Whitefield’s (2006) study of public views of representation in postcommunist democracies draws upon survey data collected between 1993 and 1997 in thirteen countries including Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. Letki and Evans (2005: 519) use survey data collected in 1993-4 and the 1998 scores in Vanhanen’s Index of Democracy “to test the role social trust plays in the emergence of democracy” in East-Central Europe (including Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine). Anderson and Tverdova (2003: 91) use survey data collected in 1996 among “mature and newly established democracies,” including Russia. For a departure from this tendency that re-purposes earlier survey data for studying autocratization, see Rose et al. (2011).

¹⁶ For example, see Cameron (2007), Dowley and Silver (2002), Hale (2005), and Kopstein and Reilly (2000).

¹⁷ The need to publish timely and informed studies of events of this significance (along with the availability of information online) likely explains this tendency.

¹⁸ While it would have been preferable to examine trends separately for Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine, there were too few published articles with identifiable methodologies (at most 1-2 per year) for Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁹ For a select series of exchanges and contributions, see Schmitter and Karl (1994), Bunce (1995), Bunce (1998), Cohen (1999), Fish (2001), Anderson et al. (2001), King (2000), McFaul (2002), Bunce (2003), and Hanson (2003).

²⁰ For a comparison of Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan after regime change, see Hale (2011).

²¹ For the Data Access and Research Transparency statement, as well as the Journal Editors see <<http://www.dartstatement.org/>>. Debates on the implications of DA-RT may be found at

<https://dialogueondart.org/>. A valuable discussion including contributions from leading journal editors may be found in the Spring 2016 issue of the newsletter of APSA's Comparative Politics organized section, available at: <http://comparativenewsletter.com/>.

²² A valuable symposium on DA-RT that includes contributions from leading journal editors may be found in the Spring 2016 issue of the newsletter of APSA's Comparative Politics organized section, available at: <http://comparativenewsletter.com/>.